

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MILI, TH, CB

SUBJ: THAI/CAMBODIAN CLASHES -- MAI PEN RAI

REF: A) STATE 139591

BEGIN SUMMARY: THAILAND'S PRESENT FOREIGN POLICY
STRESSES ACCOMMODATION WITH HER NEW COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS.
NEITHER THE RTG, NOR THE THAI PUBLIC HAS PUBLICLY REACTED
SHARPLY TO CAMBODIA'S AGGRESSIVE STANCE ON BORDER OR
FISHERIES ISSUES. THE THAI BELIEVE THAT THE NEW CAMBODIAN
GOVERNMENT IS FEELING ITS REVOLUTIONARY OATS AND WILL
ULTIMATELY SETTLE DOWN. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE RTG WILL
ALLOW RECENT CLASHES TO SIDETRACK THE THRUST OF ITS
ACCOMMODATION POLICY. END SUMMARY.

I. BACKGROUND

1. SINCE COMING TO POWER THE KHMER COMMUNISTS (KC)
HAVE AGGRESSIVELY ASSERTED THEIR NEW NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY
AND PREROGATIVES, INCLUDING MORE INTENSIVE PATROLLING OF
CAMBODIAN OFF-SHORE AREAS. AS A RESULT, THE CAMBODIANS
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HAVE SEIZED A NUMBER OF THAI FISHERMEN AND EXCHANGED

SHOTS WITH THAI COASTAL PATROL VESSELS (FBIS 92121825
JUNE 75).

2. THE SCENE ALONG THE THAI-CAMBODIAN LAND FRONTIER
IS MORE MIXED. OUR VISITS TO THE BORDER AREA SUGGEST THAT THERE
IS BOTH ANTAGONISM AND COOPERATION, DEPENDING ON THE LOCAL
SITUATION. THE GOVERNOR OF TRAT PROVINCE TOLD OUR
POLITICAL ASSISTANT RECENTLY THAT HE THOUGHT THE SITUATION
HAD QUIETED SINCE THE EARLY BROUHAHA OVER MOVING THE
BORDER STAKES (BANGKOK 9757).

II. THE THAI REACTIONS

3. THE THAI HAVE DOWNPLAYED THE MOST RECENT BORDER INCIDENTS.
THE THAI LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS BURIED IN THE INSIDE PAGES
THEIR STRAIGHT, UNEMOTIONAL REPORTING OF RECENT SEA
CLASHES. OTHER MEDIA COMMENTATORS HAVE MAINTAINED THE
SAME BALANCED LINE (BANGKOK 11197).

4. WITH THE FALL OF CAMBODIA, THE THAI NAVY AUGMENTED ITS
RESOURCES IN THE DISPUTED AREAS BY TWO COASTAL GUNSHIPS.
THESE VESSELS, HOWEVER, HAVE NOT FIGURED IN ANY CLASHES.
TRAT PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES HAVE TOLD US THAT, IF ANYTHING,
THE RTG IS NOW REDUCING THE PREVIOUS TEMPORARY AUGMENTATION OF
LAND SECURITY FORCES ALONG THE BORDER.

III. RTG FOREIGN POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

5. THAILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY PRESENTLY STRESSES
ACCOMMODATION WITH HER NEW COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS. RTG
CRITICISMS OF THE U.S. RESPONSE TO THE CAMBODIAN CAPTURE
OF THE MAYAGUEZ DIVERED FROM A DESIRE NOT TO LET U.S.
ACTIONS PREJUDICE THAILAND'S CASE WITH PHNOM PENH (SEE
BANGKOK 8862, 8899, AND 8995). LIKEWISE, THE RTG
IS TRYING TO AVOID ANTAGONIZING THE NEW KHMER LEADERS THROUGH ITS
HANDLING OF KHMER MASF EQUIPMENT NOW IN THAILAND.

6. THE OPINION WE RECEIVE FROM RTG OFFICIALS IS THAT
THE KHMER ARE IN A FLUSH OF REVOLUTIONARY
ELAN WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY SUBSIDE. THE THAI ALSO FEEL
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THAT THEY ARE RECEIVING HEAT FROM CAMBODIA BECAUSE OF THE
LATTER'S LOSS OF OFF-SHORE ISLAND TO THE VIETNAMESE.
THE RTG FEELS THAT PHNOM PENH WILL ULTIMATELY ACKNOWLEDGE
THAILAND'S NON-AGGRESSIVE STANCE AND THAT SOME WORKABLE
ARRANGEMENT WILL RESULT.

IV. COMMENT

7 THAI-CAMBODIANCLASHES HAVE NOT BEEN MAJOR INCIDENTS.
THERE IS A LONG HISTORY OF CAMBODIA, VIETNAM, AND BURMA
TAKING UMBRAGE AT THE INTRUSIONS OF THAI FISHING VESSELS.
THE RTG IS NOT TAKING NATIONALISTIC OFFENSE AT THESE CURRENT
SKIRMISHES, AND IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE RTG WILL ALLOW THESE
RECENT CLASHES TO SIDETRACK THE THRUST OF ITS ACCOMMODATION
POLICY.
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